

Michigan
Department
of Human
Services

Prepared by the
DHS Office of
Communications
(517) 373-7394

*DHS cited in stories

Articles in Today's Clips

Thursday, October 23, 2008

(Be sure to maximize your screen to read your clips)

Subject	Page
Abuse-neglect	2
Civic engagement	3-6
Domestic violence	7-12
Food Stamp Challenge*	13-17
Information technology	18-20
Medicaid	21-22
Poverty	23-28
News release*	29



Flint teen to stand trial in death of baby daughter

Posted by Shannon Murphy | The Flint Journal October 23, 2008 08:19AM

FLINT, Michigan -- A teen accused of shaking his 8-month-old daughter to death will stand trial in Genesee County Circuit Court.

Paul D. Powell II, 17, is charged with murder and first-degree child abuse in the July 17 death of his daughter, Takyra Rene Banks.

A Flint police officer testified earlier this month that Powell, who was 16 at the time of Takyra's death, shook the baby because she would not stop crying. On Wednesday, after hearing testimony from the Genesee County Medical Examiner, a judge determined there was enough evidence for Powell to stand trial.

He remains in a juvenile detention center without bond.

© 2008 Michigan Live. All Rights Reserved.



MICHIGAN REPORT

The Capitol Record Since 1906

REPORT NO. 205, VOLUME 47-- WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 22 2008

LAND REPORTS RECORD VOTER REGISTRATIONS; APPEAL FILED IN LIST DISPUTE

Some 98 percent of the state's voting age population is now registered to vote: 7.47 million people, [Secretary of State Terri Land](#) announced Wednesday.

And the records show winning women voters could be important this election, as 53 percent of those registered are female.

Some 330,000 additional voters registered since January, when the registration total stood at 7.14 million, and is 230,000 higher than in July.

The total tops the numbers for 2004, when 7.16 million people were registered, the previous record. And that represented only 95 percent of the voting age population, also a record.

"I'm pleased that so many people have registered to vote," Ms. Land said. "It's the first step in participating in the democratic process. Now I encourage everyone to take the next step and cast a ballot on Tuesday, November 4, either in person or by absentee ballot if you qualify. This is an important election, with many local and national races being decided. Please take time to vote."

Among the state's biggest counties, the registration increases compared to January are: Genesee, 347,366, up 3.2 percent; Ingham, 218,300, up 8 percent; Kent, 420,721, up 5 percent; Macomb, 610,708, up 4 percent; Oakland, 915,537, up 4.3 percent; Washtenaw, 273,955, up 10 percent; and Wayne, 1,435,737, up 6.5 percent.

[Here](#) are the county-by-county registration numbers.

VOTER LIST APPEAL: Ms. Land has also filed notice that she will appeal a recent federal court ruling questioning some of the processes by which the department removes names from the Qualified Voter File (See [Gongwer Michigan Report, October 13, 2008](#)).

In addition to filing the notice of appeal to the U.S. 6th Circuit Court of Appeals, Ms. Land asked the lower court to delay implementation of the order until the case is resolved. The lower court ruled the state could not cancel registrations of persons whose voter identification cards are returned by the Post Office as undeliverable.

Spokesperson Kelly Chesney said the U.S. District Court ruling would only change the current registration numbers by about 5,500 voters, but could mean more potentially ineligible voters staying on the list longer in future elections.



Thursday, October 23, 2008

Michigan voter roll surges to 98%

College towns, Democratic Wayne Co. see big registration hikes

Mark Hornbeck / Detroit News Lansing Bureau

LANSING -- A record 7.47 million Michiganders are registered to vote in the Nov. 4 general election, state officials announced Wednesday, including sharp increases in Democratic bastion Wayne County and several college areas where Barack Obama's campaign has been especially active.

That's a 4.6 percent jump from January and represents a whopping 98 percent of the state's voting age population, reported Secretary of State Terri Lynn Land.

It's also a 4.3 percent increase from the 2004 presidential election, even though the state's population has dropped off by 30,000 in the past year alone. Since July, 230,000 new voters have registered.

Democrats have made a concerted push to register voters this year, and it appears to have paid off. In Wayne County, registration is up 6.4 percent since January, to 1.44 million voters.

Counties that contain major universities also saw big jumps: 10 percent in Washtenaw, home to the University of Michigan and Eastern Michigan University; 8 percent in Ingham, where Michigan State University is located; 14 percent in Isabella, home of Central Michigan University; and 7 percent in Kalamazoo, site of Western Michigan University.

Overall, there were four times more new voters in heavily Democratic counties than in heavily Republican counties.

"The registration numbers probably bode well for Democrats," said pollster Bernie Porn of Lansing-based EPIC/MRA, which polls for The Detroit News. "The recent polling shows the odds are that new registrants are helping Democrats here, as in other states."

Tom Shields, Lansing-based political consultant to Republican candidates, said he's never seen a voter registration effort like the one the Obama campaign put together this year.

"They've done a good job of reaching out. That speaks well of the Obama campaign. But now they have to get them out to vote," Shields said.

Many women back Obama

The Secretary of State reports that 53 percent of voters are women and 47 percent are men. That's also good news for Obama. Polling has indicated that women are more likely than men to support the Illinois senator. A News poll in September showed women favoring Obama over John McCain, 51 percent to 34 percent. Men in that survey supported Obama over McCain, 44 percent to 42 percent.

Bill Nowling, spokesman for the Michigan Republican Party, said increased voter registrations don't necessarily translate to more votes for Democrat Obama or Republican McCain.

"More registered voters don't mean votes for one party or another, or that these new voters will come out and vote at all," he said.

Nowling added that registrations appear to be up in areas where ACORN was active. The FBI is investigating whether the community activist group helped foster registration fraud across the country by signing up nonexistent voters.

"We'll just have to see what happens on Election Day," Nowling said.

Michigan's record number of voters, 4.8 million (64.7 percent), came out in 2004; the greatest percentage turnout here was in 1960, when 72.7 percent of those registered voted in the Kennedy-Nixon contest.

Brent Colburn, spokesman for the Obama camp in Michigan, said the registration push concluded a couple of weeks ago, when attention turned to getting these new voters to the polls.

"Bringing new voters into the system has been a key part of the Obama campaign. Those numbers are encouraging for us," he said. "Now we have to make sure all these new registrants show up to vote on Nov. 4. That's our focus now."

Colburn declined comment on whether ACORN activities may have inflated voter numbers.

"Our effort was a wholly independent program," he said.

Liz Kerr, spokeswoman for the Michigan Democratic Party, wouldn't offer specifics on the party's strategy for getting new registrants out to vote.

"We don't publicly discuss the details of our get-out-the-vote effort," she said. "We'll just say we always work hard to bring voters out in strong Democratic areas."

In Oakland County, registration is up 4.3 percent from January to 915,537 voters, and Macomb County saw a 4 percent increase to 610,708. Livingston County had a 3.2 percent increase to 132,151 voters.

A rise in Macomb County registrations during a presidential election year is nothing new, but Clerk Carmella Sabaugh said the interest generated in 2008 has been something special. And nowhere was that more apparent than in the county's high schools among first-time voters, she said.

"This year, there was so much more interest. The students were excited about registering," she said. "The overall response was greater, and more schools participated."

In a new offering this year, the Macomb County Clerk's Office remained open until midnight Oct. 6, the last day to register for the November election. Between 5 p.m. and midnight, 120 people came through the door to register.

"Right now, we're anticipating a possible voter turnout of 80 percent to 85 percent," Sabaugh said.

'A lot of enthusiasm'

Oakland County Clerk Ruth Johnson said the county has registered 35,000 new voters since January.

"There is a lot of enthusiasm and excitement in this election, and the more people we have to participate the better," she said. "I'm very encouraged by the participation level we are seeing in both registrations and absentee voters, which is usually an indication that we will have a high turnout on election night."

Secretary of State Land said she's "pleased that so many people have registered to vote. ... Now I encourage everyone to take the next step and cast a ballot on Tuesday, Nov. 4, either in person or by absentee if you qualify.

"This is an important election, with many local and national races being decided."

Detroit News Staff Writers Jim Lynch and Delores Flynn contributed to this report. You can reach Mark Hornbeck at (313) 222-2470 or mhornbeck@detnews.com.

Find this article at:

<http://www.detnews.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20081023/POLITICS01/810230386>

☐ Check the box to include the list of links referenced in the article.

© Copyright 2008 The Detroit News. All rights reserved.

Source: Spinal Column Newsweekly

Agencies say economy as factor in domestic violence spike

by Leslie Shepard-Owsley

October 22, 2008

The economy in Michigan has already challenged families with foreclosures, job losses, and insecurity in the investment market, but as disposable income tightens and stress levels rise, families and loved ones are falling prey to another adversary — domestic violence. Though it's difficult to directly link the doom and gloom of the economy to domestic violence trends, there's a correlation between the economic decline and a spike in domestic violence cases, according to various law enforcement agencies.

One recent case-in-point occurred on Sept. 4 in Wolverine Lake. According to a Wolverine Lake Police Department report, a quarrel ensued between an unmarried couple over the inability to pay bills. The argument became heated and escalated. The woman attempted to walk away to evade her boyfriend. He barred her way, grabbed her cell phone and threw it aside so she couldn't call 911. Every time she attempted to grapple for the phone, he pushed her aside. When he shoved her for the last time, she slammed into a wall, striking her head and falling to the ground. When she got back up to defend herself by kicking him, he bound her in a headlock. Ultimately, she escaped to her son's room and locked the door.

Police arrived the next morning. Typically police would cart the perpetrator away according to a state law adopted in 1978, which was enacted to protect victims by requiring offenders to be arrested when physical evidence of an assault is observed; but in this case, the officer let it go since the woman didn't want to press charges.

Such cases seem more commonplace in a depressed economy, according to Emily Matuszczak, senior director of programs for Help Against Violent Encounters Now (HAVEN). She said the issue of scant low-income housing in Oakland County has been a contributing factor to a domestic violence problem reaching epidemic proportions.

"We are seeing a real need for adequate low-income housing and job placement," she said. "We've also seen a slight increase in both financial programs and evictions. Economic stressors create problems for women to afford housing so they can leave, otherwise they are trapped within a domestic abuse situation and see no alternatives. The size of our shelter remains a concern. We have 45 beds and rarely, if ever, do we have an opening. We always try to seek other shelters in other counties when we don't have space."

On average, HAVEN helps 30,000 Oakland County victims each year. Last year it provided shelter for 241 adults and 275 children but had to turn away 442 adults and 449 children due to lack of space. People who formerly didn't ask for assistance are requesting services now.

Matuszczak said the domestic violence statistics must be interpreted as chilling. One of out three families experience some kind of domestic abuse, according to the most recent report by the Michigan Domestic Violence Prevention and Treatment Board, and on average there are 100 domestic violence homicides annually reported in the state.

However, statistics are just one tool to gauge the problem, according to Matuszczak. Numbers don't reveal the severity or the frequency of cases since many still go unreported.

"It's hard to break down domestic violence incidents," she said. "Reports tend to estimate low because of how they are coded. The cases are usually reflected in assault and battery. So there's no way to determine which cases are domestic cases. In addition, so many offenses go unreported for many reasons. Victims may think nothing will protect them if they come forward or that there won't be the appropriate police response. If it goes into the legal system it could backlash. A woman thinks she would be blamed for not protecting the children and ultimately lose her children. There are just too many risks for the victim."

Though the economy definitely is a contributing factor to the rise in domestic abuse, Matuszczak cautions against blaming a singular cause.

"Psychological research cites that batterers are manipulative and use any means to excuse their behavior," she said. "Domestic violence at its core is exerting power and control over an intimate partner. Hard economic times aren't necessarily the problem, but it's the person feeling deficient in control and then trying to exert control on what he can."

According to Lisa Gorcyca, an Oakland County assistant prosecutor and chief of the domestic violence unit who co-chairs the Oakland County Coordinating Council Against Domestic Violence, domestic violence case numbers have soared since 2006 and the problem isn't singular to one demographic, as domestic violence transcends socioeconomic boundaries.

"I would say that the economy, as well as alcohol and drug abuse come into play as factors," she said. "I wouldn't say that the economy down slope is a trend for domestic violence, since it continues to occur everywhere from the wealthiest suburb to the poorest urban development. That said, in the context of the economy, more people are home more — either they've lost their job, or are looking for a job

and they're thrown together more than before. That scenario gives rise to opportunity."

The prosecutor's office received 970 domestic violence cases in 2006. In 2007, 1,118 domestic violence cases were brought to the prosecutor's office, according to Gorcyca. She said that number isn't representative of the whole picture. The prosecutor's office has no access to city attorney cases. Police decide where to bring the first offense to and in many cases, they are sent to a city attorney unless it's a 93-day misdemeanor offense. First offenses can also obtain a "deferral under advisement." That means that while on probation, an offender must follow the letter of the law. They must attend intensive counseling and have a clean record. Once their probationary period expires, the charge is dropped from their permanent record. If the prosecutor's office objects to the deferral, that offender isn't eligible.

For a second offense, the perpetrator is charged with a one-year misdemeanor; a third offense is charged with a two-year felony. Perpetrators do time in county jails for a one-year or lower sentence, but for felonies bringing over a year in incarceration, offenders spend time in prison time, according to Gorcyca.

Though the question of why a victim stays in a domestic abuse situation flabbergasts many, Gorcyca, says that it's not illegal to stay, but it is illegal to batter.

"In many instances the woman fears for her life if she leaves," Gorcyca said. "She can stay and get beaten or leave and be killed. The most dangerous time for the victim is when she attempts to leave. Approximately 75 percent of domestic violence fatalities result when the victim tries to break up with their perpetrator, asks for a divorce, or moves out."

Gorcyca attributes the greater case load of arrests to community awareness and solid and sound police practices.

"There are a lot of resources for awareness and education," she said. "Now neighbors are calling on coworkers or family members. We also see more people being more vocal than ever before. They see an incident going on and call. Hospitals are also mandatory reporters and must disclose an incident or they are charged with a felony. Any injury sustained from an assault must be reported. Coupled with good police work, it has heightened the apprehension of these perpetrators. We proceed regardless if the victim wants to revoke the charges. It's not up to them; it's the state pressing charges to protect the victim."

In the lakes areas, several communities report an upward trend in domestic violence complaints and arrests. There is a general consensus that alcohol and drug abuse in addition to financial duress feed into the upward trend.

WALLED LAKE

The city of Walled Lake has experienced a rise in domestic violence arrests. In 2007, 64 complaints were filed and 32 arrests were made. Thus far in 2008, local police have received 73 complaints and arrested 37 suspects.

Chief of Police Brent Liddy said he has seen a growing trend where women are the perpetrators. He said in approximately 20 to 23 percent of the department's arrests, females are the offenders. The relationship between the perpetrator and the victim varies, according to Liddy, who said that the number includes boyfriend/girlfriend, sister/sister, mother/daughter, and wife/husband incidents. While the number of women arrested continues to rise, he said males still dominate as the aggressor in 77 to 80 percent of cases.

According to Liddy, only 10 percent of the city's domestic violence cases resulting in an arrest involve a weapon; however, many of those arrested are repeat offenders.

"These offenders have a high recidivism rate," he said. "There are some cases when they have two to three assault arrests over a span of a few years. I've seen it where they've moved and had five or six on their record or fled one county or crossed state lines. Though those are the extreme offenders, I've seen it happen."

Liddy said although he can't attribute the rise in domestic violence to economic conditions, the current economic decline is a plausible factor.

"In 2006, there was a sharp spike in arrests, up to 62," he said. "True the economy at that time was bad but not as bad as it is now and those numbers were exceedingly high. However, I do think the economy and the number of domestic violence cases are linked. Money issues are triggers, as are alcohol and drug abuse. In hard economic times these abuses tend to increase, which essentially is a snowball effect."

Liddy said he also believes high unemployment rates add to the domestic abuse problem.

"Unemployment is higher than ever historically and we're seeing more and more substance abuse," he said. "There's a definite connection since in many of these domestic cases, someone has been indulging in substance abuse. Our numbers may not always support this theory but it's common knowledge among law enforcement."

According to Liddy, the courts are proactive in ordering anger management for perpetrators. For those incidents where an arrest isn't the appropriate response, officers make it standard practice to hand out packets disseminated by HAVEN for counseling at the scene.

Ultimately, Liddy said the goal for law enforcement is to enforce Public Act 389 of 1978, which protects victims.

"That's why we have the law we do," he said. "Personal protection orders, counseling, education and awareness, and the court system have all been effective in giving law enforcement the tools to deal with domestic violence."

WIXOM

Wixom has seen a significant increase in domestic violence incidents. Comparing data from March 1 to Oct. 1, 2008 with data from the same period of 2007, there's been a 21.6 percent increase in domestic violence occurrences. Statistics indicate the trend continues to be prevalent among the male/female relationships, including boyfriend/girlfriend, husband/wife, or ex-spouses.

According to Wixom Public Safety Director Clarence Goodlein, the economy definitely has played a role in the increase.

"Many people don't have the resources to deal with excess conflict — they're fragile," he said. "The economic down slope has added much stress to people's diets and they don't have the wherewithal to deal with it. Emotional coping skills aren't in their emotional toolbox. To access those skills, all they find is a screwdriver with a broken tip to mitigate the experience. Excess stress is an avenue to act out."

According to Goodlein, alcohol is a factor in many of the domestic violence incidents. The main catalysts commonly associated with the crime are financial problems or situations involving children.

"It goes from pushing to kicking to hitting to, sometimes, killing," Goodlein said. "The laws in place now have helped minimize the killing. Now convincing evidence corroborated through the 911 tape, the slightest injurious mark, or evidence of destruction of property is enough to corroborate a claim to make an arrest," he said.

WOLVERINE LAKE

The number of domestic violence incidents in the village has risen from 2007 when 10 domestic arrests were made, to 13 arrests so far in 2008.

According to Wolverine Lake Police Sgt. John Ellsworth, the economy has acted as a trigger for stress in everyday life, which hasn't helped the individual on the brink of a meltdown.

"I can't break the reasons down to one like the economy, but stress factors like the inability to pay the bills add to an alcohol or drug problem, and that presents the scenario," Ellsworth said.

He added that he's seen more women batterers. In 2007, four women compared to six men were arrested in domestic violence cases in the village. In 2008, four women compared to nine men have been arrested for domestic violence. This is contrary to the norm seen in past years. Ellsworth attributes the police department's tactics when discerning a case at the scene for the discrepancy.

"We take more time at the scene and try to understand the dynamics of each case," he said. "You can't always presume it's the male. Between departmental training and education, it has opened our eyes to identifying the problem rather than reacting."

MILFORD

Milford Police aren't seeing any evidence to prove the economy has been a big impact on domestic violence case numbers. Milford is reporting 126 family trouble calls, 34 of them for domestic violence, between Jan. 1 and Oct. 16 this year, compared to 117 family trouble calls, 37 of them for domestic violence, from the same time period last year.

"The majority of family trouble calls are for verbal arguments," said Milford Police Lt. Michael Lauridsen. "We've seen about one additional call a month, but we haven't noticed any significant changes; but things could change before the year is over."

Lauridsen added that the majority of domestic violence incidents are between spouses or boyfriends and girlfriends, and that a fair percentage involve alcohol and drugs.

He said he hasn't notice any particular reason for the incidents relating to the country's economic situation.

"We work closely with the courts and HAVEN to help prevent domestic violence," he said.

COMMERCE

Domestic assault cases are up significantly in Commerce Township this year when compared to cases from last year, according to Oakland County Sheriff's Department Commerce Township Substation Commander Lt. Clay Jansson.

"For the first nine months of this year, 2008, compared to the same nine months of last year, 2007, we've had an increase of 53 reported cases to 77 cases this year," he said. "That's a rather traumatic increase if you ask me."

Jansson said he can equate most of the increase to the recent downturn in the economy.

"I'd say a good portion of them have to be due to the downturn in the economy," he said. "People are feeling the pinch, people have lost their jobs and are home more and have more contact with family members."

Jansson also said it's hard to notice a trend within the recent spike, but did say most cases are often between spouses.

"Most of the calls we've been getting are between a husband and wife, or boyfriend and girlfriend," he said.

WHITE LAKE

White Lake Township police have been called to 44 domestic incidents so far this year, according to Police Chief Ron Stephens.

Broken down month by month for 2008, there were five in January; two in February; six in March; five in April; three in May; one in June; three in July; one in August; five in September, and five so far in October.

"You can interpret the 10 months that we have here as pretty much an average and not showing a particular spike," Stephens said. "Or you could look at May, June, July and August at three and one, three and one, then in September and October there's all of a sudden five each. You could call that a spike."

"I think that typically in difficult financial times, domestic violence does increase," he said. "It places pressure on the family in terms of if there are already some problems in families over drinking or financial problems, and unemployment creates more drinking by the family member that drinks. It also increases the spending habits, the spending questions and there becomes conflict over spending priorities which results in some violence."

ORCHARD LAKE VILLAGE

The affluent city of Orchard Lake Village has distanced itself from the unsavory subject of domestic violence. Although the city has a handful of reports each year, to date there has only been one arrest in 2008 compared to seven in 2007.

According to Police Chief Fred Rosenau, no city is immune to domestic abuse.

"Many of these kinds of crimes go unreported," he said. "Men won't report if they've been beaten by their wives and yet that goes on more than in years past. Fear is often a factor. The victim is often afraid and doesn't want neighbors to know. It could even be the ethnic background that forbids them from lodging a complaint."

Rosenau said that typically domestic complaints go up around the holidays.

"We're making more arrests than we did 15 to 20 years ago, but it's usually the case where drinking is involved and things escalate and get out of hand," he said.

HIGHLAND

Oakland County Sheriff's Department Detective Steven Zdravkovski said he's noticed, if anything, a decline in the number of domestic violence cases reported to the department's Highland Substation.

"It's been pretty average," he said of recent case numbers. "Earlier in the year we were prosecuting one a week. It hasn't been like that in a while. I would be surprised if our numbers showed an increase."

According to Zdravkovski, the substation sees a little of everything when it comes to domestic violence reports; however, the most commonly reported abuse comes from fights between boyfriends and girlfriends.

Zdravkovski said the substation sees a mix of woman-on-man violence and man-on-woman violence, and that drinking is involved in most cases.

The state usually presses charges if deputies have cause to believe abuse occurred. Zdravkovski said most of the charges resulting from domestic cases are misdemeanors.

From March through June of 2008 the substation received 24 domestic assault calls. In July through October of 2008, the department received 10 domestic assault calls.

A common example of domestic abuse reported in Highland occurred earlier this month. Police responded to a report from a woman who said her boyfriend of 15 years got drunk and began to verbally abuse her. The woman told police she walked away to sleep down the hall and the man grabbed her from behind, threw her down, bashed her head into a heat register, punched her in the head and then grabbed her throat to choke her. When deputies arrived they found the man two doors down, hiding behind a bed. He looked drunk and smelled of intoxicants, according to sheriff's department reports.

The man told deputies he had gotten into a "hassle" with his girlfriend but didn't choke or hit her. They arrested the man and took him to the Oakland County Jail.

WEST BLOOMFIELD

Lt. Carl Fuhs of the West Bloomfield Police Department said he hasn't seen a spike in the number of domestic assaults or incidents this year.

"I haven't noticed an increase over the last few months," he said. "I don't see any change from what we normally get called to."

Fuhs also said it would be hard to quantify those numbers since such cases are also listed as assault and battery cases.

Furthermore, domestic cases can be written up as felonious assaults when things get really out of hand.

"You'd think with the way the economy is, they'd show an increase, but I'm not noticing one this year," Fuhs said.

WATERFORD

Over the last two years there have been approximately 1,391 cases of domestic assault reported to the Waterford Police Department. The victims range in age from infant to 99-years-old and are both male and female.

According to numbers provided by the department, in 2007 most assaults occurred between 2 p.m. and midnight. The days of the week with the most reported assaults are Tuesday, Monday and Saturday, with Tuesday having the most reported.

Specific numbers for 2008 weren't received before press time.

The numbers for cases reported in 2007 and 2008 showed the age group with the most assault victims in Waterford was victims age 16 to 29.

Sgt. Scott Good, administrative sergeant for the Waterford Police Department, said he couldn't determine whether a rise in domestic assaults would be due to the current state of the economy.

"It's hard to make a direct correlation; however, in general, finances are one of the top contributors to relationship stresses," he said. "Thus, it's anticipated, and we try and combat it with awareness and alternatives."



Violence Against Women Act grant to provide free legal help to domestic violence victims

Posted by Shannon Murphy | The Flint Journal October 23, 2008 10:17AM

GENESEE COUNTY, Michigan -- A \$448,369 Violence Against Women Act grant will provide free legal assistance to domestic violence survivors in Genesee and other surrounding counties.

Legal Services of Eastern Michigan received the grant and will partner with four domestic violence shelters to implement new services, including the YWCA of Greater Flint Inc. and Genesee County Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault Services Program. Services also will be provided in Lapeer, Bay, Arenac, Midland and Gladwin counties.

With the grant, Legal Services of Eastern Michigan and its partner shelters will establish a multicounty domestic violence civil legal representation program. The effort will target low-income domestic violence survivors and those living in rural areas.

© 2008 Michigan Live. All Rights Reserved.

Are we angry at the poor in this country?

Posted by [aheller](#) October 22, 2008 14:25PM

"It takes a lot to make my wife mad," wrote the reader, "and you did it with your column on (food). If you want to learn how to live on a little over \$5 a day per person in the family, call her!"



That e-mail fairly represents a disturbingly large percentage of the reaction I got to my column several weeks ago about the Michigan Food Stamp Challenge.

To recap, the challenge was an effort by the Michigan Department of Human Services. The idea was simple: Give government and media types a food stamps debit card and have them live for five days like 1.3 million people in Michigan do all the time, on \$5.87 per day. Through their experiences, people would see the scope of the hunger problem in the state and donate to their local food banks, which supplement governmental aid.

Only it didn't happen like that, at least for some. Sure, some readers got the point. But more were like the aforementioned mom - angry.

In general, those people seemed to think that living on a relative pittance is easy, and that many people on assistance squander food benefits on junk, which I'm sure some do. We've all seen people using food stamps on Twinkies and other junk.

But I passionately disagree that getting by on \$5.87 a day is a picnic, especially for a single person. A family getting assistance would benefit from the multiplier effect -- \$5.87 per day per person gives you a bigger pot, adding flexibility.

But a single person? Well, I may be a lousy shopper, but living for five days on roughly \$30 wasn't that easy.

Here's what I bought: a bag of soft tortillas, three bananas, saltines, spaghetti noodles and sauce, a can of red beans, a can of refried beans, 1.5 pounds of ground beef, an onion, rice, cheese, a can of tomato soup, peanut butter, fruit cocktail, three yogurts, eggs, and a box of cereal. My plan was to eat the cereal (no milk), yogurt and bananas for breakfast; crackers, cheese, peanut butter, soup and fruit cocktail for lunch; and somehow stretch the spaghetti, rice and taco fixings for five dinners.

My total, after discounts, was \$27.04.

I didn't do that badly, I thought at first. But you'll notice there are no drinkables whatsoever, little meat, few vegetables, limited fruit, no condiments, no toiletries, no soaps or detergents, no extras or desserts.

I'm sure I could have stretched my dollar farther, and believe me if I were living on that amount of money I would. A lot of readers, in fact, pointed out ways to do just that - from getting bread at discount stores to using coupons to cooking from scratch.

What I don't understand is the tone of irritation to some of the phone calls and e-mails I got. Some of it may have been one-upmanship, as in "Maybe YOU think that's tough, and maybe others do, too, but I could live like a king on that."

But I got the distinct impression some were almost mad at the needy, as if they were necessarily scamming the system, or that \$5.87 was simply too much.

I can't bring myself to think that way. Aren't civilized societies supposed to help out the least fortunate?

I view it simply, I guess. If you're on assistance, things obviously aren't going well. There but for the grace of God go I.

Comments

46mtroyal says...

One of the reasons for increased hunger today is the mandatory auto insurance laws. Go to <http://www.autoreform.org/090998mar.pdf> (44% said they could not buy food due to mand auto insurance.) I requested a survey (badly done by the Montana DPHHS) which showed 12 of 96 food stamp applicants said auto insurance was a reason for needing food stamps. That equals 30,000 in Montana over the last 20 years. <http://www.foodstampstudy.com> Hank Hudson of the Montana DPHHS is wrong, Allen Nichols is correct, you can have a food stamp skyrocket due to a mand auto insurance law. We need more surveys in this and the USDA has no objection, but Joan Miles of the Montana DPHHS will not allow any more surveys, even if privately funded. Posted on 10/22/08 at 10:30PM

yooperandy says...

Sunny, I'm truly at a loss to explain the lack of compassion. This is not a good time to be poor in America.

Posted on 10/22/08 at 8:16PM

sunnyd01 says...

Thanks for your article today. I too am amazed by the response. I work in a program that works with families living below the federal poverty guidelines (incomes under 22,000 for a family of 4). Most of the families I see are working, often 2 jobs - but unable to get ahead.

I hope none of the people commenting here end up in this situation. Many of the clients I see never thought they would need government assistance and are ashamed to come to ask for help.

Posted on 10/22/08 at 8:07PM

MarkoRollo says...

I volunteered at the Katrina drop off site at the old Fisher Body on S. Saginaw. It was the old 80-20 rule: for every 4 families who came in looking for a bed, linens, etc., there was one family who seemed to take advantage of the system.

I've decided life is built around the 80-20 rule: no matter what you do, 20% of the people seem to spoil it for the other 80%. Whether it is the idiot talking on his cell phone at a movie theater, or the lady on welfare buying soda and Twinkies, someone pushes the rules right to the edge until the rest of us cry "enough." Then we pass a law. Or make a regulation. Or take away the benefit. It isn't our fault. When we're on the outside looking in, we tend to notice the Twinkie lady and ignore the other 80% who really need help. It's because we're all decent folks who want to help others, but we really hate to be taken advantage of. Which brings me to my point (you're welcome). As a society, are we willing to help the 80% and accept the 20% that take advantage of our generosity, or are we so angry about the 20% that we're willing to make everyone else suffer?

Posted on 10/22/08 at 7:26PM

jenn13081 says...

I completely agree with some of the comments posted after my first. It is ridiculous that people take advantage of the system or use it in a way that wasn't intended. I think we have to be careful though, and remember that those abusing the system are not a fair representation of the entire group of people that receives assistance. The system may not be perfect, but there are honest, hardworking people who are being helped. And, aneo, I don't think it's fair that to call people receiving assistance ignorant and lazy. Sure, some people are content to take what they can get and not give anything back. But would you say to the parents that work two jobs and to put a roof over their children's heads, clothes on their backs, food on the table- and still come up short? Too bad, it's your choice? I don't think that most of them want you to feel sorry for them. During the time you received food stamps, did you want pity? At the time you were selling the excess because you were so thrifty, was that legal?? Because I think selling your benefits is one of the complaints that open2opine, and probably many others, have with the current system. I just have a hard time understanding why it was okay for you to receive assistance at one time, but those that need it now are ignorant, lazy people who are choosing to be poor. I'm not trying to be rude, I'm just asking because I truly don't understand.

Posted on 10/22/08 at 5:50PM

open2opine says...

I don't have any experience with food stamps (apparently I am on the high-end of the poor scale) but I have used the WIC program designed for pregnant mothers and their children (benefits stop when the child reaches the age of 5). I also work full-time to support my family and am glad to have had access to that program when I needed it. I would like to see the food stamp program run more like the WIC program in that when receiving WIC you are only allowed to purchase certain items and quantities such as milk, cheese (the real cheese - not processed), eggs, peanut butter, beans, 100% fruit juice, and cereal (from a list). At least that way the food stamps are not being wasted on junk or items with little nutritional value. Make allowances based on family size, children's ages, etc. Sure it would be a lot of work to implement it but c'mon - don't you think it would save in the long run? I am a tax-payer and have been since I was 15 years old - I don't feel bad about utilizing a service I truly needed for a short period of time but I get irritated seeing people on assistance (many for their entire lives) and taking advantage of it, wasting it, SELLING or TRADING food stamps for whatever, etc. I am not wealthy myself - but I do get disgusted with 'poor' people who take advantage of public assistance. Some of them are making more money than me and doing it all under the table and that's no too fair either. And stop

having babies if you can't feed them. That should be mandatory too - tubal ligation after the second child if you are still in need of government assistance. I could rant forever on this one but I won't. UGH!

Posted on 10/22/08 at 4:14PM

pigiron says...

I think that a lot of the frustration/anger/whatever you want to call it comes from a couple of sources. First, the fact that the government plays such a role, as opposed to charities/churches/foundations. Second, there are always those few who mess things up for everybody, like the lady I know who doesn't work (by choice), and brags about the really good deal she got on a plasma tv. We, as taxpayers, paid for it.

Posted on 10/22/08 at 3:40PM

yooperandy says...

jenn and lndscpurb, you said it better than I said it.

Posted on 10/22/08 at 3:38PM

Lndscpurbnsn says...

What you don't realize, aneo, is that the vast majority of 'poor' people in America are what are called, the working poor. Because they hold jobs (sometimes several) but are still unable to afford the basics.

Posted on 10/22/08 at 3:12PM

jenn13081 says...

I find it sad that people would react in such a way to that column. As you mention, I'm sure some do abuse the system, but I truly believe that most of the people receiving assistance are hardworking families just trying to get by and put food on the table for their kids.

Maybe the people who reacted with anger, rather than empathy, are those who are lucky enough to have never gone without. Or if they did, they have forgotten what that was like. God forbid that any of these people ever find themselves in a situation where they need help. I wouldn't wish hard times on anyone, but with the state of the economy, it isn't inconceivable. Perhaps opinions would change. I agree that we should be helping out the less fortunate. This is AMERICA!!!

Isn't that what we do? If we work to make things better for people around the world, shouldn't we try just as hard- if not harder- to do the same the people who live in our own neighborhoods?

Posted on 10/22/08 at 3:01PM

aneo says...

The good lord helps those who help themselves.

Posted on 10/22/08 at 2:52PM

aneo says...

I got food stamps at one time. I got so many I used to sell my excess because I never changed my shopping habits that I had before I went on food stamps. At \$5.00+ a day per person, a family of four can do quite well. You just don't buy a lot of processed food, brand name canned food, sweets, pop, junk food, etc. And you actually have to cook. It sure beat what I used to eat when I was a kid back in the forties. We ate a lot of bean soup and if we were lucky, a few potatoes were

thrown into it. Am I mad at poor people? Yes, I am. In this country if you aren't willing to do the hard work to overcome your own ignorance and laziness, staying poor is a choice. Why should I feel sorry for people who makes such poor choices?

Posted on 10/22/08 at 2:51PM

Michigan Consolidates IT, Pushes Mobile Service Delivery



Oct 22, 2008, By Corey McKenna

Photo: Michigan Gov. Jennifer Granholm

Michigan government continues to be among the leaders in the drive to streamline government operations while improving citizen service delivery. This year, Michigan took 2nd in the 2008 Digital States survey, a biennial survey of technology use by state governments, conducted by the Center for Digital Government.

Michigan's effort to consolidate its information technology infrastructure helped maintain its status as a top Digital State. And that consolidation has allowed the state to increase the quantity and quality of services delivered to citizens while reducing cost. Since 2006, over 100 services have been added to Michigan.gov. The state currently provides 300 services online through a single portal, which has seen nearly a 30 percent increase in visitors since 2006.

Michigan is also focused on increasing citizen engagement through mobile devices and social computing. The state is utilizing IT consolidation to aggregate data, such as test scores from 25,000 schools, as well as health care and public safety information.

Infrastructure consolidation and use of flexible technologies (such as service-oriented architecture, software-as-a-service and shared services) is key to making this possible. Over the past six years, MDIT has reduced IT expenditures 24 percent -- saving the state nearly \$100 million, according to Michigan Chief Information Officer Ken Theis.

When it is fully implemented, Michigan/1, Michigan's statewide central IT platform, will be at the center of nearly every strategic initiative and will transform the foundation of technology statewide.

Initiated 18 months ago, the consolidation effort is standardizing file and print services, desktop installations and security solutions. So far, seven of 19 agencies have been migrated to the system. By 2010 the state plans to complete conversion of all 55,000 desktops and 900

applications to the common platform. When completed, the consolidation will cut the number of servers supporting state offices from 2,612 to 670.

The statewide IT platform will also give state workers more flexibility regarding where they may work. New laptops will provide broadband and Wi-Fi access over a secure network allowing employees to work in any state office and find the same technological capabilities. In its response to the Digital States survey, MDIT noted this will help prepare the state for pandemics and other emergencies and that the approach has already proven successful. In 2007, the state Department of Environmental Quality lost its entire storage system after a hardware failure. However, since Michigan/1 was in place, the department was up and running again in a single weekend.

Currently, the support desk has increased first-call resolution by 15 percent and this is expected to grow with increased call volume. In the future, more than 80 percent of desktop problems will be resolved remotely.

At the end of the day, though, all this consolidation and cost-saving is about increasing service delivery in a tough economic climate. Michigan currently provides 300 services on its Web site. The most popular include fishing license applications, online state parks and campsite reservations, traffic information, criminal history background checks, real time alerts (including weather, AMBER, virus and PC exploit alerts), online certificate (birth, death, marriage and divorce) ordering, professional certification look-up, state medical benefits look up, business licensing applications, job search, unemployment insurance applications, vehicle registration and driver's license renewal, as well as online procurement.

Michigan.gov currently sees 44 million visitors annually, while the segment of those visitors accessing the site on a mobile device is growing by 20 percent per year. Currently 350,000 users visit the site through a mobile device each month.

Tourism is a large part of the Michigan economy that brings in \$1.1 billion in tax revenue and contributes \$18.8 billion to businesses in the state. An important part of that tourism is fishing, and charter boat operators reported they were losing money. Most charters in Michigan begin at 5 A.M., long before bait shops open. As a result, new or one-time anglers were showing up at the docks for their charter without a fishing license; either not realizing that one was needed or assuming it would be provided. This omission put both the angler and the charter operator at risk, while the state was missing out on licensing revenue. The solution: fishing licenses in the form of a text message stored on the angler's cell phone. The angler visited a Web site specially designed to be viewed on a mobile device, and within three minutes could obtain a license. As a result, thousands of anglers in Michigan have used the service to obtain a license, and neither users or licensing officers have reported any problems.

The Michigan Department of Natural Resources was the first agency to pilot a major policy shift toward accepting text messages stored on a mobile device as proof of licensure, balancing the need for a paper license with the convenience of buying a license online. And neither DNR licensing officers or applicants for the licenses reported any problems with the system.

Michigan sees mobile devices as "the emerging channel of choice for the next generation of citizens," according to the state's Digital States 2008 entry. Michigan sees DNR's success with issuing fishing licenses via a mobile device as an opportunity to issue other licenses (e.g. special permits for building trades) via a cell phone as well. In fact, there isn't an agency in state government involved in licensing an activity that could not benefit from DNR's mobile licensing solution, according to the state's survey response.

Clearly, Michigan deserves the mantle of a Digital State. As technology implementation continues in Michigan, the rest of the country may yet see the possibilities of living digitally, while elected officials will see the benefits that working digitally can bring to state government efficiency and their residents' quality of life.



October 23, 2008

Schneider: MICHild just too much for some doctors

Sheri Bloss' daughter got immunized.

After writing Saturday about Bloss' ordeal in finding a local doctor willing to accept a new patient with MICHild insurance, I got an invitation for Bloss from the folks at the Sparrow/MSU Family Medicine Residency Program.

I passed it along. Bloss made an appointment for Monday. Her 11-year-old daughter got the shots she needed, plus a general check-up.

"My daughter is now up to date on her immunizations," Bloss wrote in an e-mail to me, "and I have an office to take my girls to if they're ever in need of health care - an office that was happy to accept the insurance the state assists me with."

So, that problem is solved. But what about the bigger problem? What about the fact that Bloss was rejected by 15 doctors' receptionists - all of whom were listed as MICHild participants - when they learned her daughter was a MICHild client?

MICHild, administered by the state Department of Community Health and Blue Cross Blue Shield of Michigan, is for children of working, low-income families. According to officials at both the health department and Blue Cross, MICHild reimburses doctors at the same level as commercial insurance. And the MICHild claims process, they insist, is no more onerous than for standard insurance.

That's why they were baffled by Bloss' experience.

Educational effort

Community Health spokesman James McCurtis said, "We work with doctor groups to educate them about these matters, but some don't want to deal with it."

In Saturday's column I quoted Beth Charles, manager of Great Lakes Pediatrics Associates, who acknowledged that doctors there had declared a "moratorium" on new patients with state-funded insurance.

The explanation: It would be "unfair" to accept MICHild, which reimburses at commercial rates, while rejecting Medicaid, which doesn't.

By the way, some readers asserted that county health departments provide free immunizations to all who seek them.

The fact is that some will give shots to people with health insurance, and some will not.

"It's up to each local department," McCurtis said.

Ingham County Health Department spokesman Marcus Cheatham said, "If a person with a primary-care doctor shows up for immunizations, we'll send them back to the primary-care doctor.

"If not, we will administer the shots and accept the insurance."

Productive lives

WESTPHALIA - On Oct. 7, Elizabeth Gloria Vos was born to Jennifer and Chris Vos of Plymouth, making her the 100th - yes, 100th - great grandchild of 91-year-old Margaret Platte of Westphalia.

Platte's daughter, Mary Lou Russell of Lansing, provided the formula that yielded 100 great grandchildren:

Margaret and Norman Platte had 12 children. Those 12 teamed up to produce 65 offspring, who have, in turn, made 100 babies.

So far.

Call John Schneider at 377-1175, send a fax to 377-1298 or e-mail jschneid@lsj.com.

Michigan Welfare Rights Organization

...the union for low-income people!

Welcome to the MWRO blog...the only weblog in Michigan dedicated to welfare recipients, low-income workers, and economically disenfranchised residents of this state. Help us fight the cuts and attacks against the poor.

<http://michiganwro.blogspot.com/>

Wednesday, October 22, 2008

[Tragic Poverty Fires in Highland Park...and the MWRO Utility Summit](#)



TAMMY STABLES BATTAGLIA/Detroit Free Press

Firefighters work to contain a Highland Park fire that involved five homes early this morning.

The nights have started getting colder in southeast Michigan and low income families are struggling to keep warm. With the socioeconomic crises in Detroit and surrounding areas--no jobs, layoffs, home foreclosures, wide-scale poverty, very low food security, illness--many poor and fixed income households often have to decide between which bills to pay.

Low income families living in large, old, poorly insulated homes in Detroit and Highland Park more often than not are unable to pay altogether for electricity, natural gas, and water. So they make small payments hoping that it will suffice but it doesn't.

Early this morning, **another family in Highland Park became victim to poverty fires**--dying in one's home because you can't afford to pay for the utility(ies) you need to properly heat it. A beloved grandmother and her three young grandchildren (5, 8, and 10) burned in their home while the children's mother and other relatives luckily managed to escape. According to the [Detroit Free Press](#), the fire department confirmed what neighbors already knew: the fire started from a small space heater used to keep the children warm while they slept.

Yesterday, a neighbor shared information with the grandmother about getting help with her heat bill through [THAW](#), an agency that assists low income families with high bills and getting utilities turned back on. [THAW](#) is largely funded through redirected funds from [DTE](#)--the Detroit-based utility company that shut-off the family's natural gas in the first place!

Corporations should not be making profits off of the utilities needed for supporting life. We *all* have the right to shelter, heat, food, water, clothing, and other human rights...and **no corporate bottom line should determine who stays warm or who dies**. This tragedy, along with neighboring burned homes, never had to happen if low-income families had better assistance, better resources, better information about how to protect their families!

[Michigan Welfare Rights Organization](#) is organizing its annual Utility Summit to help families and individuals learn how to avoid utility shut-offs and get assistance. Please encourage your family, friends, and neighbors to attend as we try to put an end to the horror of poverty fires!

MWRO UTILITY CRISIS SUMMIT

[Wayne County Community College](#), Downtown Campus

1001 W. Fort St, Detroit, MI 48226

5:00-7:30pm

Thursday, Oct. 23 for surnames beginning A-L

Friday, Oct. 24 for surnames beginning M-Z

Learn how to avoid utility shut-offs and home foreclosures!

Bring your bills...Show your voter registration card and get a free meal!
Register at (313) 258-6826



October 22, 2008

Heater blamed in blaze that killed woman and 3 children

BY TAMMY STABLES BATTAGLIA
FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER

After Josephine Dale awoke her son and pregnant niece, yelling for them to get out of the burning Highland Park home, she forged ahead through the smoke in an effort to save her grandnephews and grandniece.

Dale, 51, and the three children didn't make it out. Firefighters found her body today in the charred remnants of her home, together with brothers 10-year-old Orlando (Dewey) Glover and 5-year-old Melvin (Petey) Turner and their sister Zeryha Dale, 8.

The children, all students at Robert E. Barber School of the Gifted & Talented in Highland Park, were asleep in an upstairs bedroom when the fire broke out about 3:30 a.m. Investigators blame a space heater the family was using to keep warm.

The natural gas service had been shut off to the home, which had no smoke detectors.

Four neighboring homes on Waverly, west of Third and just south of the Davidson Freeway, also were burned by the spreading fire. The residents of one of the four homes escaped; the other three were vacant.

"I slightly heard: 'Get out! There's a fire!'" Willie Dale said of his mother's efforts. "She ran upstairs to wake us up."

Unable to see as they moved through heavy smoke, Willie Dale and his girlfriend, Kiki, made their way out of the house with their 10-month-old baby, whom they call Little Mama. His cousin and the mother of the three children, Katie Dale, 26, also escaped.

Katie Dale, 18 weeks pregnant, was kept for monitoring at Henry Ford Hospital's Labor and Delivery unit in Detroit this afternoon, physically all right but emotionally devastated.

"She's still in a state of shock," said her brother, Darnell Dale, 31, of Taylor as he visited her at the hospital.

Sadly, it's the type of tragedy the Dale family has lived through before. As she stood outside the home where her aunt and cousins died, Charrise Dale, 38, of Highland Park said a house fire two years ago killed her sister, Nancy Dale, who was in her 20s.

"Just pray for us," Charrise Dale said about what well-wishers can do for her family. "Just keep us in their hearts and be strong for us."

Another aunt, Janise Dale, said 10-year-old Dewey loved to play basketball and skateboard and was a straight-A student. She said 8-year-old Zeryha was an aspiring cheerleader who liked baby dolls. And 5-year-old Melvin, whose favorite pastime was playing with his Batman and Ironman toys, had just started kindergarten this year.

Josephine Dale's friend of 30 years, Betty Matthews, said Dale's heroic efforts in waking her family and trying to save the children sound just like the woman she'll miss.

"Everybody loved her," Matthews said. "It doesn't bother me, the bodies coming out. I know God had his arms around them."

Matthews said neither she nor her friend could afford the gas to heat their homes. Matthews has been using kerosene and propane for 10 years. She said she had just shared the phone number for a local heating assistance help line, 800-866-THAW, with Dale when they chatted Tuesday.

"I was trying to tell her I got a phone number for us to get help to get heat," she said. "She shouldn't have to have a space heater."

Matthews, as well as other neighbors and relatives, questioned the Highland Park Fire Department's response and whether the street's fire hydrants were working properly.

"That lady did not have to be in that house that long if the fire department would have gotten there on time," Matthews said.

Highland Park Fire Department Capt. Patrick McClelland said a ladder truck and two fire engines responded within five minutes of the call to 911.

"It was a ball of flame when we pulled up," he said.

But the first hydrant where firefighters hooked up their hose reportedly had such low pressure they were forced to divert to two other hydrants.

The Detroit Fire Department was called to assist when the fire spread out of control to other houses.

In the end, nothing was left of three houses but their charred frames and basements. Two other houses on either end were charred.

Neighbor Doreen McCarther said she went to bed about 2:45 a.m., but awoke a little while later to people yelling across the street.

"I heard, 'Help! Help! My babies are in the house!' When I looked out my window, I saw flames coming out of the house."

Neighbors put a coat on Katie Dale and tried in vain to calm her.

"She was trying to get us to go in the house, but it was too much in flames," McCarther said.

McCarther said the fire spread quickly between the homes as one fire truck sprayed the flames.

"We saw the next house catch, then Keith's house caught," she said of another neighbor's home. "We was like, 'Where's the other truck?'"

Highland Park Emergency Financial Manager Arthur Blackwell said that "when you get a fire that's that far along ... with no smoke detectors, with these frame houses, they go up."

Responding to family and resident questions about why the city didn't get assistance sooner from the Detroit Fire Department, Blackwell said firefighters called on Detroit after they determined they could not save the people in the Dale home.

"We're looking for life first, not saving an abandoned house," Blackwell said. "Our first priority is to protect and save lives, and when we got things under control, we called them. When a truck got freed up," Detroit "responded. Their first response is to their city."

Blackwell said that in the past few months Highland Park has knocked down about 300 of approximately 600 abandoned homes, and 100 additional homes are slated for demolition.

The Red Cross is assisting the Dale family. Carolyn White, acting superintendent of Highland Park Schools, said five district schools and charter schools in the area also will work together to help the families with clothing and plan to start a fund to help pay for funerals. Details on the fund will be reported in the Free Press and at freep.com.

The family did not have any insurance, relatives said.

"It's devastating, just devastating, something like this happening," White said outside Barber School today. "We're going to be surrounding the family and working with them. The school district and the community, we're a very close community, so we will get them anything they need."

Contact **TAMMY STABLES BATTAGLIA** at 313-223-4456 or tbattaglia@freepress.com.

Michigan Department of Human Services News Release

**Contact: Gisgíe Dávila Gendreau, director of marketing and public relations
(517) 373-7394**

October is Child Support Month

Michigan employers play critical role in child support collection

Oct. 23, 2008

What do Michigan's big three automobile manufacturers, major grocery store chains and UPS all have in common?

Many Michigan employers, large and small, are partnering with the state of Michigan to help Michigan's children by collecting child support from their employees through the income withholding process. These partnerships play a critical role in the collection and distribution of child support, as nearly 80 percent of all child support collected through employer withholding.

Gov. Jennifer M. Granholm recently proclaimed October as Child Support Month to recognize the importance of parents meeting their child support responsibilities in strengthening families and providing critical financial support to children.

"The commitment from these employers helps children receive the money their custodial parents need to pay for housing, food and clothing," said Marilyn Stephen, director of the Department of Human Services' Office of Child Support. "During Child Support Month, it's important to recognize that employers play a critical role in keeping children and families out of poverty."

From Michigan's three automobile manufacturers with combined 33,000 child support payments per month, to the small employer who sends in one or two payments a month, Michigan's employers share DHS' commitment to ensuring that the state's children get the child support due them. Many employers submit the payments electronically, a process that reduces errors, shortens the processing time and cuts costs for employers. Once the payment is received, it often can be disbursed to the custodial parent within 24 hours through direct deposit to a client's bank account or to a debit card.

Michigan's child support central collection and disbursement unit, the Michigan State Disbursement Unit (MiSDU), is a federally mandated entity, established by the 1996 Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act. In 1999, Michigan legislation authorized the MiSDU, which is managed by the DHS Office of Child Support, to receive and disburse child support payments. The MiSDU works in partnership with the county Friend of the Court offices and county prosecuting attorneys.

The MiSDU processed \$1.44 billion in collections in the fiscal year ending September 2007, an average of more than \$120 million per month. The customer call center, housed at the MiSDU, averages more than 26,000 calls each month from child support clients, employers and friend of the court offices.

Michigan's child support program is considered one of the most efficient in the country. For every \$1 spent on program operations, more than \$6 in support is collected and distributed. The national average for all states is less than \$5 for every \$1 in program costs.

For more information, please go to www.michigan.gov/childsupport.